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# Nineteenth-Century Schools between Community and State: The Cases of Prussia and the United States

*Jurgen Herbst*

Forty years ago Bernard Bailyn remarked that American historians of education had carried out their work “in a special atmosphere of professional purpose” and had made the history of the public school the focus of their investigations.<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Cremin seconded that observation and added that, for all intents and purposes, the history of American education had been “the history of the public school realizing itself over time.”<sup>2</sup> In the tradition of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley that self-realization of the American public school was portrayed as a progression from local roots to state-wide systems. It became synonymous with the evolution of school government from local control on the district and ward levels to direction and oversight by state administrators. For many school professionals and historians that progression meant progress. They saw it as overcoming local control which they regarded as a relic of the past denoting an endorsement of inequality, discrimination, and special privilege. It persuaded them to see the solution to the schools’ problems in strengthened state and, eventually, federal control.

Since then many historians have come to question this “progressive” interpretation of the history of the public school and to qualify their distrust of local control and their faith in the efficacy of state intervention. In fact, today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, some historians suggest a reverse trend and write that “in countries around the world the power of the central state over the educational system has diminished in

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 8.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965), 25.

the past two decades.”<sup>3</sup> Those historians who take the long-range historical view propose neither a progressive nor a regressive interpretation but suggest a more judicious evaluation of the issue. In his *Pillars of the Republic* Carl Kaestle, while acknowledging a general progressive trend, wrote of “continual” and “bruising” adjustments of claims and powers between different levels of government over the control of schools. He termed these adjustments “one of the central dynamics of American educational history.”<sup>4</sup> Writing specifically of federal intervention, he and Marshall Smith believed it to be appropriate “on issues of fundamental social and constitutional importance.” But they also cautioned that federal programs should be so constructed as to “foster local decision making while transcending local variation.”<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Potash, referring to state programs in the history of education in Vermont, also recognized a more balanced and balancing view and spoke of “a series of pendulum swings.” Those, he wrote, who are “seeking to extend the state’s ability to impose greater uniformity succeed in part” but “then find themselves pressed to the defensive when insufficient financial resources and exaggerated promises induce localities to defend their traditional rights.”<sup>6</sup> Whether “continual and bruising adjustments” or “pendulum swings,” neither of these metaphors fit the Cubberley view of uninterrupted, unidirectional progress, nor its opposite, the suggested current trend toward decentralization.

In this essay I shall contend that the metaphors of bruising adjustments and pendulum swings serve us well to understand the history of schooling not only in the United States but also in countries on the other side of the North Atlantic Ocean. To be sure, for a comprehensive investigation we need a book-length study that will trace in detail the development of schooling in the American states and in the various European countries and compare the results with each other. But here I have chosen the more modest but still comprehensive purpose of contrasting and comparing the nineteenth-century history of public school governance in the United States with that in Prussia. I conclude that the overall trend in both countries has been remarkably similar but that the details of this development show significant differences in the degree to which the state or civil society set the parameters for school governance in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>3</sup>David N. Plank and Gary Sykes, “How Choice Changes the Education System: A Michigan Case Study,” *International Review of Education* 45 (May/June 1999): 386.

<sup>4</sup>Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 225.

<sup>5</sup>Carl F. Kaestle and Marshall S. Smith, “The Historical Context of the Federal Role in Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 52 (November 1982): 408.

<sup>6</sup>Jeffrey Potash, “State Government and Education: ‘For the Due Encouragement of Learning and the Better Regulating and Ordering of School,’” *Vermont History* 65 (Winter 1997): 62.

### *Schooling in Premodern Prussia and Colonial America*

In the premodern era central governments on both sides of the Atlantic were concerned primarily with the Latin education of their professional leadership. Education in the vernacular was largely left to parents and the local agencies of civil society. In ethnically and religiously homogeneous states and colonies with an established church like Prussia and Massachusetts the central government's influence over education, limited as it was, made itself felt more readily than in colonies of greater ethnic and religious diversity. There, the role of local agencies of civil society, assisting parents in providing elementary schooling for their children, was more pronounced. The prevalence in the colonies, and later in the United States, of social diversity, whether ethnic or religious, and the vastness of space in rural areas laid the foundations for the strong hold of local control in matters of elementary schooling.

A closer look at the German-speaking countries of premodern central Europe will show that, as in Europe generally, schooling had its beginning for a chosen few as a Latin education under the patronage of churches, princes, or local landlords. For most of the population, however, instruction in the vernacular in reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion, if it took place at all, remained a matter of parental responsibility in the home. In this educational task parents were aided by neighbors and relatives and prodded and supported by their churches and synagogues, their civil communities and, in rural areas, by their patrons, the manorial lords. Civic corporations, called *Schulsozietäten* or school societies, constituted school districts and carried most of the financial burden. Though in Prussia the Crown, as the head of the established church, had been indirectly involved in school sponsorship; it was not before the late eighteenth century that it asserted its role as an active source of educational policies. Until then schooling had been very much a responsibility of parents and civil society.<sup>7</sup>

For settlers in the English-speaking colonies of North America the circumstances of migration and settlement largely determined the arrangements they made for schooling. In Massachusetts, for example, anxiety for collective survival in a precarious physical, as well as social, environment had prompted the provincial government six years after its landfall to authorize the funding of Harvard College to assure an advanced Latin education for their future secular and religious leaders. Within another six years it assigned responsibility for the elementary education of children to parents and masters of indentured servants. It took another five years for the General Court to step in once more and order towns of fifty families or more

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<sup>7</sup>Wolfgang Schmale and Nan L. Dodde, eds., *Revolution des Wissens? Europa und seine Schulen im Zeitalter der Aufklärung, 1750-1825* (Bochum: Dieter Winkler, 1991), 13-31.

to appoint teachers for English reading and writing schools and towns of one hundred families or more to open a Latin grammar school to prepare boys for Harvard College. The Court thus imposed upon Massachusetts towns its vision of a state-wide educational system, even though Boston, Charlestown, Dorchester, and a handful of other towns, prodded by their local ministers and other concerned community leaders, had already hired Latin schoolmasters before Harvard College opened its doors.<sup>8</sup>

In other colonies elementary schooling in literacy and numeracy evolved, as it had in Europe, as a matter for family, church, artisan-masters, and community. Ethnic and religious diversity of the population necessitated a reliance on local agencies and mitigated against a centrally directed colony-wide effort. Pennsylvania with its "Noble Experiment" of providing a haven of toleration for Quakers, Mennonites, Pietists, Moravians, Lutherans, Baptists, and others placed a premium on community and church sponsorship of schools. In contrast to Prussia's established church, the churches in Pennsylvania had no state connections. New York and New Jersey—with their mixture of Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, German, and English immigrants—likewise shunned centralized direction. In New York City, as Carl Kaestle wrote, "the tolerance of the coexisting minorities ... born of social necessity" led to diverse educational arrangements of parental efforts, private schoolmasters, apprenticeship contracts, and church-sponsored instruction that was unregulated by central authority and prevailed into the early nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Everywhere one could find private venture schools whose owners, for a price, promised to teach their students whatever they wanted to learn.

The educational scene in the English colonies thus varied in the degree to which governments directed, interfered with, or abstained from interfering in the educational activities of civil society. Wherever provincial governments assumed a role in elementary and secondary schooling they sought, as a rule, to delegate responsibilities to subordinate units, such as cities, churches, or employers of youth. Nonetheless, the modern tension between local and state control over education showed up early in American history. The case of Worcester, Massachusetts, in the 1760s provides an example. Acting to encourage a classical education the General Court pressured the town to hire a Latin schoolmaster. The town fathers, preferring to use their tax moneys for the support of English rather than classical learning, protested vigorously.<sup>10</sup> Similar tensions—in pendulum swing fashion—were

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<sup>8</sup>See Jurgen Herbst, *The Once and Future School* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 11-12.

<sup>9</sup>Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 27.

<sup>10</sup>See Jon Teaford, "The Transformation of Massachusetts Education 1670-1780," in *The Social History of American Education*, eds. B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 29-34.

to manifest themselves in subsequent centuries repeatedly on both sides of the Atlantic.

### *State Direction of Schooling: An Issue on Both Sides of the Atlantic*

Toward the end of the eighteenth century a more sustained pressure for state direction and supervision of schooling gained force in America as well as in Europe. The reasons were much the same on both sides of the ocean. In America the Revolution and Independence, in Europe the Enlightenment and the rise of nationalism, in Prussia in 1806 the military defeat at the hands of Napoleon's armies, and everywhere, the transformation from a feudal and largely agricultural to a modern, bourgeois, and expanding urban-industrial society contributed to this trend. On both sides of the ocean, too, prominent statesmen took leading roles in devising plans for state systems of education. In the United States, Thomas Jefferson, while unsuccessful during his lifetime, laid the basis for what became the American public school system. In Prussia Wilhelm von Humboldt's plans, proposed by him despite his own misgivings, are still discussed in many European countries.

As the following paragraphs will show, the pressure to consider a more active role for the state in education came not from teachers, parents, or local taxpayers but, as with Jefferson and Humboldt, from philosophers, statesmen, authors, and politicians. They initiated a debate over the desirability of state or national systems of education. They argued that only by gathering up and providing unified direction of their countries' educational energies could governments cope with the demands of economic modernization, social integration, and political stabilization. They asked that schooling be raised from its many diverse local levels to one of common effort and goals.

In Prussia the push for administrative reforms had begun in the first third of the eighteenth century when university teachers of what were then called the cameralist and police sciences recognized the political connection between schools and a country's constitution.<sup>11</sup> Royal appeals urged parents and landlords to see to it that children in their villages learned to read, write, and become acquainted with the rudiments of Christian

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<sup>11</sup>Manfred Heinemann, *Schule im Vorfeld der Verwaltung: Die Entwicklung der preußischen Unterrichtsverwaltung von 1771-1800* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1974), 33. Cameralism (*Cameralkwissenschaft*) is the older European word for the science of public administration; police sciences (*Polizeiwissenschaften*) refers more particularly to the study of "appropriate forms of administration and the well-being of and discipline of citizens," and to the preparation of proposals for government legislation. See Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "New Structures of Knowledge," in Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 515.

doctrine.<sup>12</sup> In 1774 Johann Heinrich Bergius, a student of the early cameralists wrote that the state could no longer rely on parents to educate their children towards love of country, industriousness, and productive competence. Public authority, he wrote, had to institute and supervise the schools.<sup>13</sup> Thirteen years later Karl Abraham Freiherr von Zedlitz, Prussia's Minister of Justice responsible for the country's religious and educational affairs administered by the Lutheran Church, translated academic treatises and recommendations into administrative regulations. In his *Suggestions for Improving Education in Kingdoms* he stressed the need for increasing the number of public schools and placing them under central secular supervision.<sup>14</sup> The Crown endorsed his proposals which culminated in the creation of the *Ober-Schulkollegium*, a State Higher School Board. It was to supervise and inspect all schools, including the existing private ones, and to administer the examinations of candidates for teaching positions. The capstone of these writings and this legislation was placed in 1794 in Prussia's General Land Law which declared schools and universities to be "institutions [*Veranstaltungen*] of the state" which should be established only "with prior knowledge and permission of the state" and were to be "subject to the supervision of the state and to its examinations and visitations at all times." This was accompanied with a rarely enforced edict of compulsory school attendance for children at the age of five whose parents were unable to provide for the necessary instruction at home.<sup>15</sup> As Manfred Heinemann observed, the impetus of these measures was never lost.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of state-sponsored education, however, was contentious from the beginning and has remained so for two centuries. Traditional school sponsors—religious congregations, municipalities, school societies, and patrons—resisted what they saw as the "meddling" of the *Ober-Schulkollegium*.<sup>17</sup> Opponents spoke up when in 1788 Johann Christoph von Wöllner, Zedlitz's successor as official in charge of Prussia's religious and educational affairs, published his *Religionsedikt* and imposed a rigid censorship on Prussia's teachers and university professors. Ernst Christian Trapp,

<sup>12</sup>*Deutsche Schulgesetzgebung, 1763-1952* eds. Leonhard Froese und W. Krawietz, 2nd ed. (Weinheim: Julius Beltz, 1968), 91, 94, 105-111. See also Heinrich Lewin, *Geschichte der Entwicklung der preußischen Volksschule* (Leipzig: Dürr'sche Buchhandlung, 1910), 42-91.

<sup>13</sup>Heinemann, *Schule im Vorfeld*, 24-25.

<sup>14</sup>Zedlitz's proposals, "Vorschläge zur Verbesserung des Schulwesens in den Königlichen Landen," were first published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 10 (1787): 97-116. They have been conveniently reprinted in *Staat und Schule oder Staatsschule? Stellungnahmen von Pädagogen und Schulpolitikern zu einem unerledigten Problem, 1781-1889* ed. Christa Berg (Königstein: Athenäum, 1980), 1-9. They are discussed in Heinemann, *Schule im Vorfeld*, 152-156.

<sup>15</sup>Froese und Krawietz (eds.), *Deutsche Schulgesetzgebung*, 2nd ed., 23, and Lewin, *Geschichte der Entwicklung*, 142-146.

<sup>16</sup>Heinemann, *Schule im Vorfeld*, 168.

<sup>17</sup>See Franzjörg Baumgart, *Zwischen Reform und Reaktion: Preußische Schulpolitik 1806-1859* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 22-24.



a leading philanthropist philosopher and in 1779 the first professor of education at a German university, asked in 1792 for the unfettered establishment of private schools and instruction and for the elimination of state-sanctioned supervision of schools by church authorities. The state was to refrain from prescribing the schools' curricula and the education of teachers.<sup>18</sup> In the same year Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote his celebrated essay, "Ideas for an Attempt to Determine the Limits of the State's Effectiveness." In its chapter on national education, published in 1792 in the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, Humboldt rejected the argument that examples from republican antiquity could serve as models for monarchical Prussia. In a republic, he wrote, citizens were in charge of their own affairs and could well be entrusted with governmental authority over themselves. But in a monarchy they lived under the thumb of royal authority and needed to be safeguarded against arbitrary power. State-directed education, Humboldt wrote, implied that individuals were citizens and subjects whereas private educators viewed them as human beings. It produced a uniform character type and led to imbalance in the body politic. Thus, concluded Humboldt, public education lay outside the limits to which the state should be restricted.<sup>19</sup> Children should be free to attend schools of their parents' choice.

On the other side of the ocean, a few years before Zedlitz's installation of the *Ober-Schulkollegium* in Prussia, Thomas Jefferson had introduced into the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1779 a bill for public schooling under state-wide legislation.<sup>20</sup> The bill foreshadowed Humboldt's argument that citizens of a republic could entrust the administration of schooling to their elected representatives. Democratic government in a republic, Jefferson argued, required that all citizens be schooled in common because each was a potential legislator and responsible for the common weal. Yet Jefferson, like Humboldt, also recognized the limits to which state action in education was to be confined: he did not want to deprive parents of their rights to determine the education of their children. As his friend, the Frenchman Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemour, stated in a plan for a national education which he had written at the behest of and in cooperation with Jefferson: "It does not follow that the American Republic has assumed the power or the right to claim for the State, the Ruler, its delegates or anyone else in the world, the exclusive privilege of instruction." De Nemour asked for

<sup>18</sup>Berg (ed.), *Staat und Schule oder Staatsschule?*, xviii-xix and 22-36.

<sup>19</sup>Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen (1792)," in *Werke in Fünf Bänden*, eds. Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel, vol. I (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), 56-233. [Section on public education in chapter VI appears on pp. 103-109.] See also the English language edition, *The Limits of State Action*, ed. J. W. Burrow (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 46-52.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Jefferson, "Bill for the General Diffusion of Knowledge," in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd, vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 526-535.



respect for “the rights promised in the Constitution,” and advised that private schoolmasters and parents alike should be allowed to teach children, provided that they use the state-prescribed textbooks and that their students pass the national examinations given to all children.<sup>21</sup> Overall direction and supervision by a democratically elected government, not detailed control of individual schools and schoolmasters by an administrative bureaucracy, was Jefferson’s intent. As it was, Jefferson did not live to see his blueprint turned into reality.

De Nemour’s comments call attention to the similarity of Jefferson and Humboldt’s thoughts and actions about public education. Humboldt, we should add, had been persuaded by his King after the military collapse of Prussia to accept in 1809 the position of head of the Section on Culture and Public Instruction in Prussia’s central administration. His assignment was to reorganize Prussia’s entire public education system. Humboldt agreed reluctantly, overcoming his earlier expressed scruples about state-directed education. He feared that, if he refused to serve, he would be accused of being ungrateful, of lacking love of country, and of deserting those in need.<sup>22</sup> He persuaded himself that through a temporary reliance on state action he might in the end bring to fruition the educational reforms he desired.<sup>23</sup> Both he and Jefferson had acted under the impact of war.<sup>24</sup> Jefferson, a committed revolutionary and champion of democratic government in a republic, had issued his call for state action in the midst of war. Humboldt, a dedicated reformer and loyal servant of his monarch, had set in motion state action in the aftermath of war. Neither of them wanted to take the direction of schooling out of the hands of parents and local taxpayers, but both came to propose systems of state education that would, in the end, achieve just that.<sup>25</sup> While Jefferson’s system was to become in subsequent decades the blueprint for America’s public schools,<sup>26</sup> Humboldt’s vision, while never put into action in all its details, remained and remains a potent force in educational reform plans discussed in Europe.

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<sup>21</sup>Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, *National Education in the United States of America* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1923), 147-148.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Herbert Scuria, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Werden und Wirken* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1970), 81 and 201.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. the interpretation advanced in Ursula Krautkrämer, *Staat und Erziehung: Begründung öffentlicher Erziehung bei Humboldt, Kant, Fichte, Hegel und Schleiermacher* (München: Johannes Berchmans Verlag, 1979), 77.

<sup>24</sup>Educational reforms introduced in times of crisis or war appear to have been a constant in history. See Kaestle and Smith, “The Historical Context,” 390-392.

<sup>25</sup>Jürgen Herbst, “Thomas Jefferson und Wilhelm von Humboldt: Universitäts- und Schulgründer,” *Humboldt International: Der Export des deutschen Universitätsmodells im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* ed. Rainer Christoph Schwinges (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 2001), 273-287.

<sup>26</sup>See James B. Conant, *Thomas Jefferson and the Development of American Public Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

*The Persistence of Local Control in the United States*

During the first half of the nineteenth century the push and pull between the advocates of local and state control over public education on the elementary and secondary levels continued in both Prussia and the United States. In the latter a widely scattered, predominantly rural population of diverse ethnic and religious allegiances drew on the revolutionary generation's suspicion of administrative authority and its commitment to representative republican government. It resisted the calls for creating state systems of national education and fought the efforts of public school reformers to abolish the district system and introduce state supervision. In defeated monarchical Prussia the central government, relying on its well-trained civil servants, the *Beamten*, succeeded in balancing traditions of local responsibility for public and private schooling with administrative oversight. It used clergymen of its established church and of the Catholic Church to act as supervisors of teaching in the classrooms of the local confessional public schools. Its policies increased in effectiveness after the failed revolution of 1848.

In the United States the defeats of Jefferson's plan of 1779 and of a similar proposal he introduced in 1817 assured that Virginia's schools remained under the control of their local sponsors. The same can be said of schools in other American states, despite a series of publications which in the 1780s and 1790 championed other plans for state initiatives in education.<sup>27</sup> They, too, bore no fruit. As Siobhan Moroney recently pointed out, one looks in vain for legislative enactments or administrative changes in the country's common schools that might have become evident after the turn of the century. Apart from a few voices calling for a national university and enactments in some states for centrally supervised secondary and college education, "there [was] virtually no debate over national [or state] control or oversight of schools or curricula."<sup>28</sup> Americans preferred their private venture schools and their district system of local control over the common schools.

A widely scattered population in small towns, villages, and the countryside accounts for the resistance to centralized direction or supervision of schooling. In Massachusetts the legislature recognized this decentralization in rural areas and small towns in its education law of 1789 which sanctioned the district system. In larger commercial cities local populations generally favored tax-supported common public over private schools.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>See Allan Oscar Hansen, *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977) and *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>28</sup>Siobhan Moroney, "Birth of a Canon: The Historiography of Early Republican Educational Thought," *History of Education Quarterly*, 39 (Winter 1999): 486.

<sup>29</sup>See Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 9-27.

Boston brought its primary schools under local public control in 1818 and three years later opened the country's first public high school as a municipal institution. In 1827 the General Court endorsed local taxation for common schools and made it mandatory statewide. Not until the late 1830s and 1840s, when school reformers set under way what has come to be known as "the public school revival," did the state begin seriously to scrutinize and concern itself with public education. Until then local control of the common schools remained the rule of the land.

In states where attempts had been made to introduce viable supervisory state agencies for the administration of academies, Latin grammar schools, and colleges, resistance rose, paradoxically enough, from the states themselves. In New York, for example, the State Assembly rebuked its own creation, the "Regents of the University of the State of New York," when it was displeased with its actions. The Regents had been charged with visiting and inspecting "all the colleges, academies, and schools" in the state and to incorporate newly founded colleges and academies.<sup>30</sup> But when the Regents used their authority to favor and incorporate academies and colleges that offered a classical education and mathematics, they offended parents and school masters who preferred an English curriculum with instruction in utilitarian and scientific subjects like surveying, navigation, and book-keeping. It was then that the legislators, prompted by their constituents, stepped in and forced the Regents to acknowledge that the academies were the proper institutions for useful studies while the colleges could hold on to a literary and moral curriculum.<sup>31</sup> The state had sided with the people in their localities and undercut its own agency.

Similar developments occurred in Georgia and Michigan. In Georgia the *Senatus Academicus*, made up of the trustees of the University of Georgia and of state officials, also tried to promote the academies as classical schools. And again as in New York, the Georgia *Senatus* had to yield to the desire of the voters and was forced to support the academies as English schools for Georgia's sons and daughters or, in some instances, as finishing schools for girls. In 1837 the Georgia legislature stopped the attempt to direct a state-wide system altogether when it decided to end the funding of the academies. In Michigan a state Board of Regents, paying primary attention to academic preparatory and higher education, had been

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<sup>30</sup>See Jurgen Herbst, *From Crisis to Crisis: American College Government, 1636-1819* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 139, 168-169.

<sup>31</sup>See Frank C. Abbott, *Government Policy and Higher Education: A Study of the Regents of the University of the State of New York, 1784-1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), passim, and Jurgen Herbst, "The Regents of the University of the State of New York, 1784-1920: Secondary Education Emerges in the New Nation," in "The Colonial Experience in Education," eds. Antonio Novoa, Marc Depaepe, and Erwin V. Johanninger, in *Paedagogica Historica*, Supplementary Series, I (1995), 317-333.

established in 1817. Just as in New York and in Georgia, it lost its functions when in 1846 the legislature abolished appropriations to the academies, and the state superintendent declared the union schools of the state's public education system ready to take over the academies' work.<sup>32</sup>

As part of the public school movement legislators had introduced state superintendencies and normal schools for the training of teachers in many states. That movement had begun in 1837 when Horace Mann in Massachusetts and Henry Barnard in Connecticut were appointed as secretaries of their respective State Boards of Education. Other states soon followed, although some, Georgia among them, waited until after the Civil War. The pioneers of the movement were motivated by what they saw as the deficiencies of the existing common schools. Most glaring to them was the excessive decentralization of the district system in rural areas. But even in cities like Boston, as David Tyack writes of the 1840s, "the trustees of the primary schools were largely an independent, self-nominating, and self-perpetuating body. . . ." They and supporters of the district system elsewhere, many of whom were members of, or affiliated with, the Democratic party, fought Horace Mann and his supporters whose penchant for centralization they condemned as "associated . . . with King George, Prussian autocracy, and monopolies."<sup>33</sup> In 1840, however, they lost their battle when their bill for the abolition of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and the normal schools was decisively defeated.<sup>34</sup> Yet despite this setback, resistance to outside supervision of district schools, whether by town, city, or state, persisted.

Continuing battles were fought in the name of localism and loyalty to parochial schooling. In the late fifties and early sixties the residents of Beverly, Massachusetts, provide a good example when they opposed the establishment of a high school in their town. As Maris Vinovskis tells the story, some citizens "were unwilling to relinquish control of their local school districts to the town school committee, and many were even less willing to acknowledge the state's right to determine how education should be structured and run in their community—even if denying the state's role meant ignoring state laws."<sup>35</sup> In large eastern cities religion emerged as the point of dispute. Catholic citizens resented the Protestant character of much public schooling. When during the 1830s a wave of Nativism led to the burning of convents, and anti-Catholic publications flooded the country,

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<sup>32</sup>See Herbst, *The Once and Future School*, 55-56, 60.

<sup>33</sup>David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 33-34.

<sup>34</sup>For an account and analysis of the 1840 school board election see Kaestle and Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change*, 213-232.

<sup>35</sup>See Maris A. Vinovskis, *The Origins of Public High Schools: A Reexamination of the Beverly High School Controversy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 111.

New York City's Catholics requested public funds for schools of their own. The city's aldermen denied the petition, and the issue finally found a compromise solution in the state legislature in Albany. Local school districts, coterminous with city wards, were to elect representatives to a citywide Board of Commissioners of Common Schools which was to supervise the city's common schools.<sup>36</sup>

This arrangement, however, did not satisfy Catholics who complained that their children were still exposed to a Protestant kind of nondenominationalism and to the reading of a Protestant Bible. Under the leadership of Bishop Hughes, New York's Catholics then embarked on building an independent Catholic parochial school system. The bishop's initiative came to full fruition in 1884 when the Third Plenary Council required bishops and priests to build parochial schools and parishioners to enroll their children in them.<sup>37</sup> By 1890 that system enrolled 626,496 students. In New York the failure of city authorities and of the legislature to grant full powers of control over local common schools to city school districts had led to the creation of what David Tyack describes as "the largest 'alternative school system' in the United States."<sup>38</sup>

### *Civil Society versus State in Prussia*

The developments in New York, Georgia, and Michigan that produced an alliance of legislators and people against state agencies, as well as the struggle that ended in the establishment of a Catholic school system in the United States, had no parallel in Prussia. There, thanks to Zedlitz's *Suggestions* and to Humboldt's efforts, state influence over public schooling had gained a foothold that was to remain permanent. Prussian state agencies of education never had to face the threat or reality of repudiation or abolition by the legislature. But because the Prussian state was unwilling to devote more than a bare minimum of its financial resources to education, localities effectively determined the kind of schools they sponsored. Little changed during the first half of the nineteenth century. As before, school support in rural areas was left to villages, school societies, and private patrons; supervision to village priests or parsons who, being representatives of established churches, acted as agents of the state. Teachers drilled peasant children in reading and catechetical instruction for their roles as

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<sup>36</sup>For a description of the developments in New York see the section called, "First School War" in Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars, New York City, 1805-1973* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 3-76.

<sup>37</sup>Vincent P. Lannie, *Public Money and Parochial Education: Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward, and the New York School Controversy* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western University, 1968), especially chapter 12.

<sup>38</sup>David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 78.

obedient field and home workers. Opportunities for school choice were virtually nonexistent. In towns and cities where religious congregations or municipal authorities ran the schools, parental desires for choice were accommodated to the extent that existing school facilities permitted this. The children of the poor attended pauper schools. Sons of the lower bourgeoisie who aspired to become artisans and merchants and daughters who would become their wives were sent to *Bürger-, Mittel-, and Realschulen*. Sons of the well-off destined for professional careers gathered in the *Latein- and Gelehrtschulen* as well as in the *Gymnasia* which were the pride of the community. Private schools, though nominally under state supervision, continued to exist as property of their owners.<sup>39</sup> Compulsory schooling under state supervision was neither universal nor compelling.<sup>40</sup>

This system of dual or shared responsibility for the schools has led historians to quite different evaluations of its effect on daily school reality. For Eugene Anderson the government took the initiative in school policies because of the public's disinterest or silent support.<sup>41</sup> Achim Leschinsky and Peter-Martin Roeder in their *Schule im historischen Prozess*<sup>42</sup> likewise placed the emphasis on the side of the state. Thomas Nipperdey, by contrast, argued that the efforts of the state to strengthen itself by using the school as its instrument resulted in encouraging civil society to revolutionize the state.<sup>43</sup> The title of Roeder's essay, "Community Schools in the Hands of the State,"<sup>44</sup> conveys a somewhat ambivalent position, which is seconded by Karl-Ernst Jeismann who wrote that schooling in Prussia was "an instrument dominated equally by the state and social groups."<sup>45</sup> The most recent participant in this debate, Frank-Michael Kuhlemann, tends to favor society over the state. He calls particular attention to the roles of urban, middle-class groups and of local pastors, the boards of parish societies, and the

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<sup>39</sup>See Hans Heckel, *Schulrecht und Schulpolitik: Der Einfluß des Rechts auf die Zielsetzung und den Erfolg in der Bildungspolitik* (Neuwied/Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1967), 49.

<sup>40</sup>See Baumgart, *Zwischen Reform und Reaktion*, 55.

<sup>41</sup>Eugene Anderson, "The Prussian Volksschule in the 19th Century," in *Entstehung und Wandel der modernen Gesellschaft*, Festschrift für Hans Rosenberg (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1970), 261-270.

<sup>42</sup>Achim Leschinsky and Peter Martin Roeder, *Schule im historischen Prozeß: Zum Wechselverhältnis von institutioneller Erziehung und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1976), 127.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Nipperdey, "Volksschule und Revolution im Vormärz," in *Politische Ideologien und Nationalstaatliche Ordnung: Studien zur Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Festschrift für Theodor Schieder, eds. Kurt Kluxen und Wolfgang J. Mommsen (München und Wien: R. Oldenbourg, 1968), 117-142.

<sup>44</sup>Peter Martin Roeder, "Gemeindeschule in Staatshand: Zur Schulpolitik des Preußischen Abgeordnetenhauses," *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 12 (1966): 539-569.

<sup>45</sup>See Karl-Ernst Jeismann, "Preußische Bildungspolitik vom ausgehenden 18. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Thesen und Probleme," in *Zur Bildungs- und Schulgeschichte Preußens*, ed. Udo Arnold (Lüneburg: Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1988), 11-13.



provincial superintendents who, he writes, often “pursued a relatively independent elementary school policy of their own.” He concludes that until the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the Prussian elementary schools, were in many aspects of their existence, untouched by the state and remained above all community schools despite their legal status as state institutions.<sup>46</sup> All appear to agree that, whether as state institutions or as agencies of civil society, Prussian schools were public institutions. In their supervisory function clergymen acted as agents of the state.<sup>47</sup>

The strength and resilience of the Prussian educational administration lay in the professionalism of its civil servants, the *Beamten*. They saw it as their task to bring systematic order to the bewildering array of local arrangements. Whether liberal or conservative in their social and political views, the Prussian *Beamten* felt themselves to be spokesmen for the enlightened interests of the whole represented in the state. They interpreted the law to mean that it was the state’s duty to ensure that all children were educated in public schools for their roles as citizens. They were convinced that, in cases of parental neglect, it was their responsibility to represent and assert the educational interests of children. *Beamte* may have differed among themselves in details. The followers of Humboldt wanted a two-part system of general education for everyone in elementary schools and a continuation of advanced general education in higher schools for those who could muster the necessary financial and intellectual resources. They generally were adherents of the progressive pedagogical views of the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Others promoted various middle school types for a more vocational-preparatory education or subscribed to more traditional conservative views in their pedagogical philosophy. But whether liberal or conservative, reformist or traditional, as a group the *Beamten* constituted the strongest force for gradually asserting and solidifying the power and control of the state over Prussia’s educational system.

The abiding strength and influence of the *Beamtentum* derived from the common education and *esprit de corps* its members had received in the humanistic *Gymnasias* and in the universities. That education had been designed, as Hegel had pointed out, to prepare German male youth for careers in state service. This service, Hegel had written, demands “sacrificing the satisfaction of one’s independently chosen subjective purposes

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<sup>46</sup>Frank-Michael Kuhlemann, *Modernisierung und Disziplinierung: Sozialgeschichte des preußischen Volksschulwesens 1794-1872* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 78 and 86.

<sup>47</sup>In her *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Marjorie Lamberti points out that even though clergymen served as agents of the state (p. 16), the church in effect functioned together with community and state as a third “social entity with legitimate interests and formal rights in the public schools.” (p. 13).



and with that bestows the right to find them in, and only in, dutiful service.<sup>48</sup> To a large extent, this ethos of duty-bound, public-interested, and nonpartisan service enabled the members of the state administration to cooperate with one another regardless of their ideological orientations. It accounts for the continuation of at least some of the liberal policies of the Humboldt era even after the conservative reaction had begun in the wake of the Karlsbad decrees of 1819. Then the education ministry had insisted that it was sufficient when elementary teachers were trained how to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, and the basis of all true education: piety, fear of God, and Christian humility.<sup>49</sup> Subjects like grammar, geography (the latter in so far as it concerned foreign countries), political and natural history, science, and drawing, wrote King Friedrich Wilhelm III, were unnecessary.<sup>50</sup> That here and there in the variety of existing schools liberal views and Pestalozzian pedagogy survived was due to a conscientious *Beamte* and to local administrators and teachers, whether secular or religious, who chose to ignore the governmental strictures.

The failed revolution of 1848 then shifted the balance between local and state school authorities in favor of the latter. The Prussian government asserted its full force in bringing the country's educational efforts—and especially the elementary schools—under its control. The elementary teachers had to bear the heaviest burden. The Crown blamed their instructors in the teacher seminars, the German normal schools, for the disaster of the Revolution and was determined to turn the elementary schools into instruments of state policy. The schools' chief task, the Crown argued, was to keep young people safely within the social world into which they were born. While private schools had a legal right to exist, the state was empowered to supervise and inspect them, to authorize their curricula, and to ensure the moral conduct and political loyalty of their teachers.<sup>51</sup> Secondary schools became subject to systematic reorganization in a statewide comprehensive regulatory system. In it school types and the entitlements of graduates to subsequent occupational and professional careers were tightly interrelated. By the 1880s and 1890s students were allowed to transfer among the school types only in the lower two grades; their subsequent opportunities for change and choice were held to a minimum and became increasingly more defined

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<sup>48</sup>See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, 4th ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955), 294, 256-257, and Krautkrämer, *Staat und Erziehung*, 245-249.

<sup>49</sup>Altenstein to all consistories and provincial governments, July 24, 1822, Rep. 92, #25, 311-314, Geheimes Staats Archiv Berlin-Dahlem.

<sup>50</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm III to Altenstein, 15 June 1822, and Richter memorandum, 10 February 1822, Rep. 76, VII, neue Sektion 1C, Teil 1, Nr. 1, Bd. 1, Zentrales Staats Archiv Merseburg.

<sup>51</sup>See Eckhard K. Deutscher, *Private Schulen in der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte: Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Schule und Staat* (Frankfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Inauguraldissertation, 1976), 135-136.

by their parents' position in the social hierarchy.<sup>52</sup> This emergence of an educational system came about as a confluence of the systematizing impetus at work in administrative structures, parental anxieties over their children's vocational or professional placement in a rapidly expanding industrial society, and the eagerness of teachers in both elementary and secondary schools to assert and safeguard their professional self-interest.<sup>53</sup> The advocates of state control had found many willing supporters.

One result of the failed revolution was the exodus of a large number of Prussian teachers to the United States.<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm Wander was one of these. As spokesman for a German teachers' group, he had challenged the 1848 Frankfurt National Assembly to create a German common school system. In doing so, he had quoted at length from Horace Mann's 1844 report.<sup>55</sup> When he arrived in the United States, Wander was disappointed to find no evidence of an existing national school system. The American schools, he came to think, suffered from the contrast between noble intent and shabby reality. He was particularly upset with the few mediocre normal schools and the low pay for teachers. "The German teacher," he wrote, "will recognize that his profession does not flourish here."<sup>56</sup> Other German refugees had similar impressions. Rudolph Dulon, for example, praised the superintendents in the large cities for their well-informed intelligence and their commitment to reforms, but noted the widespread lack of pedagogical expertise among the rural teachers.<sup>57</sup> Much as these German teachers had hated the repressiveness of their Prussian state school administration, in the United States they were equally distressed over the absence of what they considered a professionally respectable school system.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Detlef K. Müller, "The process of systematisation: the case of German secondary education," in Detlef K. Müller, Fritz Ringer, and Brian Simon, *The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural Change and Social Reproduction, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>53</sup>Müller, "The process of systematisation," 24.

<sup>54</sup>See Juliane Jacobi-Dittrich, *'Deutsche' Schulen im Mittleren Westen der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (München: Minerva, 1988), 141, 187.

<sup>55</sup>Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, "Aufruf an Deutschlands Lehrer," in *Der Kampf um die Schule: Bildungspolitische und Pädagogische Schriften*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1979), 50-52; "Beschlüsse der 1. Versammlung des Allgemeinen Deutschen Lehrervereins in Eisenach (1848)," in Berthold Michael and Heinz-Hermann Schepp, *Politik und Schule von der Französischen Revolution bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Athenäum Fischer Taschenbuch, 1973), 384-385; and Wander, "Die alte Volksschule und die Neue," in *Der Kampf um die Schule*, II, 35-36.

<sup>56</sup>Wander, "Was hat der nach Amerika auswandernde Lehrer dort als solcher zu erwarten?," in *Der Kampf um die Schule*, II, 176-178, 182.

<sup>57</sup>Rudolph Dulon, *Aus Amerika über Schule, deutsche Schule, amerikanische Schule und deutsch-amerikanische Schule* (Leipzig und Heidelberg: C. F. Winter, 1866), 236, 238-239, 245-251, 254.

<sup>58</sup>See Bettina Goldberg, "The Forty-Eighters and the School System in America: The Theory and Practice of Reform," in *The German Forty-Eighters in the United States*, ed. Charlotte L. Brancaforte (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 207-208.

***While the Battle Continued in Both Countries, State Control Gained the Upper Hand***

During the second half of the nineteenth century battles over the control of public education continued in both countries with state control everywhere slowly but persistently gaining the upper hand. In rural America controversy raged over school administration and consolidation and the place of religion and language in the classroom. In urban centers the progressive movement advanced administrative centralization in the name of efficiency. In Prussia industrialization and commercialization provoked conflict over the kind of secondary education appropriate for the nation. Civil society won recognition for modern science and languages as subjects of equal worth with the classics but submitted to increased administrative oversight by the state.

The strength of the American partisans of local control initially brought about victories in both rural and urban areas. In the countryside and rural states, state superintendents were generally at a disadvantage compared with the locally elected school board members and township and county superintendents, “educators in overalls,” who represented their farming constituents.<sup>59</sup> Having to pay heed to the winds of politics and lacking the support of an entrenched state bureaucracy that their German confreres enjoyed, the state superintendents’ chances to prevail over local authorities were slim. During and after the 1860s they sought to overcome this handicap by replacing the township organization of district schools with the county superintendency. Their hope was thus to bridge the gap between themselves and the multitude of local and district school boards. The county superintendents soon found themselves in an unenviable position. They were caught in the crossfire between the professionals on the state level who expected them to be efficient and businesslike and their neighbors who held them accountable to their concerns. As the county superintendents had to hire and fire teachers and draw district boundary lines, they had to be politically savvy and able to manoeuvre among the conflicting local interests. Such agility almost always aroused the suspicion of the professional schoolmen who came to distrust the county superintendents despite, or perhaps because of, their dependence on them. But when the professionals sought to eliminate the county superintendents, as they did in Wisconsin at the turn of the century, they failed. As Wayne Fuller explained, the schoolmen “threatened to deprive the farmers of their right to supervise the education of their children, and [the farmers] would not have it.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>The term “educators in overalls” is Wayne Fuller’s. See his *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), chapter 5.

<sup>60</sup>Fuller, *Old Country School*, 155.

The introduction of the high school furnishes another example of resistance in rural areas to statewide initiatives. Support came mainly from cities and villages where parents saw in the high school a means to advance their children socially and economically at taxpayers' expense and where businessmen believed that such a school would boost the commercial welfare of their community.<sup>61</sup> Childless taxpayers and farmers in the rural townships generally were opposed. Farming, they believed, was not learned in a school. Besides, where they existed, midwestern high schools had begun as union schools in which two or more school districts had consolidated their resources. Such mergers, the objectors argued, usually had been followed by the opening of a normal or high school class, and the next step had been the formal establishment of a high school. For midwestern farmers the implications were clear: each move on the road to union or high school increased the distance between their home and the school and weakened their control. In a high school, far removed from the farmers' homes, the schoolmen would take over. That had happened in the cities and villages; but, if farmers could help it, that would not occur in the country.<sup>62</sup> In Wisconsin their opposition succeeded in delaying the introduction of the high school in rural areas until the next century.

The spread of the high school to rural America began in earnest when schoolmen won their fight for school consolidation. In Wisconsin this began with the union free high school law of 1909, which permitted high schools to merge across district and township lines. This law overcame a major obstacle to uniform statewide schooling: the low population density of rural areas and the resulting inability or unwillingness of local taxpayers to agree to state direction of schooling.<sup>63</sup> Farmers had resisted consolidation with all their might. The closing of their district schoolhouses, the loss of control over the schooling of their children, the costs involved, their distaste for "wagoning," as busing then was called, and the new "friends" their children would encounter weighed heavily in their thinking.<sup>64</sup> For a while, they were successful in staving off consolidation. But by World War II, the decline in the country's farm population had given added impetus to the demands of the schoolmen, and consolidation ultimately won the day.<sup>65</sup> As David Tyack put it: American schoolmen had been on their way to devise the "one best system" for educating the country's children, first in the cities and eventually also in the country.

In Wisconsin the struggle over local control reached its climax in the disputes over religion and language. Just as in New York City of the 1830s

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<sup>61</sup>See Herbst, *Once and Future School*, 79-91.

<sup>62</sup>For rural opposition to the schoolmen see Fuller, *Old Country School*, 115-119.

<sup>63</sup>Chapter 493, *The Laws of Wisconsin, 1909* (Madison: State Printer, 1909), 617-623.

<sup>64</sup>Fuller, *Old Country School*, 235.

<sup>65</sup>*ibid.*, 245.

Catholic immigrants had objected to the Protestant religiosity that pervaded the public schools, so native-born and immigrant Catholics and Lutherans in rural Wisconsin fought the same battle. German parents had asked that, like in Prussia, public schools be either Protestant or Catholic or, alternatively, their children be allowed to receive Catholic religious instruction from Catholic teachers in public school classrooms. As this did not happen, German parents enrolled their children in private or parochial Catholic or Lutheran schools where in 1894 they amounted to one-sixth of all students between the ages of seven and thirteen. In addition, in many public schools Lutheran pastors served as teachers or on the district boards.

German immigrants also fought to preserve German as the teaching language in parochial and public schools, despite the laws passed by the legislature in 1852 and in 1867 which specified that the traditional common school subjects were to be taught in English and that, as a 1869 law added, teaching in a foreign language was permitted only for one hour per school day. How this adherence of immigrants to their accustomed ways affected officials of the public school system shows up well in the 1877 report of the Ozaukee County superintendent to the state superintendent:

While I have no doubt that not as much is done in the English language as ought to be done, and knowing as I do that these Germans keep more school than the Americans . . . the question presented itself in this manner to me: Shall I, by my action, kill these schools, create a feeling against the common school system and cause the establishment of private schools; or shall I take what I can get, knowing that the next generation . . . will work into English entirely. . . Is not an educated German better than an ignorant one, even if he is educated only in German?<sup>66</sup>

We have no record of the state superintendent's response, but we know that the use of the German language continued in many of Wisconsin's schools.<sup>67</sup>

Wisconsin legislators, wary of confronting their constituents directly on the issue of religion, sought to draw the line on language. In 1889 they passed the Bennett Law which made schooling compulsory for all children between the ages of seven and fourteen and compelled instruction in the basic fields to be in English. For parochial schools whose work and certificates were to be recognized as equivalent to that of the public schools, English had to be the instructional language in their religion classes as well. The law caused a firestorm of resentment among immigrant groups. The Republican Party, which had supported the law as a defense of the "sacred-

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<sup>66</sup>See Joseph Schafer, *Four Wisconsin Counties Prairie and Forest* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1927), 235-237.

<sup>67</sup>For an account of German schools in Wisconsin see Jacobi-Dittrich, "Deutsche" Schulen, 115-210.

ness of the little red school house," was soundly defeated at the polls by a coalition of German, Irish, and Polish Catholics as well as German and Scandinavian Lutherans. The law itself was annulled in 1890. In the same year the Wisconsin Supreme Court handed down a decision in the so-called *Edgerton* case. Catholic parents had sued the Edgerton school board for permitting the King James version of the Bible to be read in public school classes. This, they argued, violated the Wisconsin Constitution which prohibited sectarian instruction in the public schools. In agreeing with the parents, the Court rebuked the public schools and handed another victory to the partisans of local control.

The Wisconsin victories of 1890, however, did not signify a national trend. As the progress of school consolidation and the spread of the high school demonstrated, in the twentieth century education professionals and state legislators continued seeking to extend their powers over local school boards. To be sure, these as well as groups of teachers and educators resisted such efforts. In the case of language and religion they were supported by the United States Supreme Court which ruled in 1919 in *Meyer v. Nebraska* that parents had the right to determine the language of instruction in public schools and in 1925 in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* that they had the right to send their children to private schools. These decisions set bounds to the otherwise uncontested power of state authorities to supervise the public schools. The pendulum swings between local and state power in public education continued into the twentieth century.

In urban areas, too, divergent interests of ethnically and religiously diverse ward populations had resisted centralized administration. The "great school wars" in New York City, for example, had ended with New Yorkers being able by 1842 to send their children to tuition-free Protestant denominational charity schools, to the financially free schools of the new public school system and, for those willing or able to afford fees, private proprietary pay schools and parish schools of the now beginning Catholic school system. Parental choice thus was circumscribed only by financial considerations, denominational affiliation, and location. In all these arrangements the principle of school control by local communities was still the rule.

But during the century's closing decades all across the country an alliance of businessmen, professionals, journalists, and other leading citizens—the movers and shakers of the progressive movement—spearheaded a campaign against inefficiency and corruption in city and public school administration. In city after city, the ward system of school board government was replaced by central school boards whose members no longer represented their ward constituents but, in most cases, were elected at large. While in 1893 in twenty-eight American cities larger than 100,000 inhabitants the number of central school board members had been 603, or 21.5



per thousand residents; this number had shrunk in 1913 to 264 or 10.2 per thousand. By 1923 it had further declined to 7 per thousand.<sup>68</sup> As in Prussia, consolidation and centralization were hallmarks of the movement. The central board members decided on policy for the city's school system in much the same way as other boards did for business and charitable corporations. They left the day-to-day administration of the schools to the city superintendent who had come to complement the position of his colleague in the state educational hierarchy. He was an expert with a staff of specialists trained in the "science of education" in university departments of educational administration. Neither he nor the state superintendent had much use for nonprofessional local control.

In Prussia the gradually but steadily increasing influence of the central government over the country's schools and the growing perception of schooling as a public national, rather than local or private, responsibility were prompted primarily by the country's industrialization and commercialization. In secondary education this process brought into the open built-in contradictions. The government's *Beamten* felt obliged to defend the primacy of the humanistic *Gymnasia* which for most of them had been the portal to positions of eminence in the state. But they also recognized the state's need to modernize industry and business and to accommodate the interests of Prussia's propertied bourgeoisie. This required them to favor secondary schools that offered curricula in the natural sciences, modern foreign languages, and commercial and technical subjects. Throughout the century's last three decades the struggle within and without the government between the defenders of the humanistic *Gymnasia* and the champions of the modern secondary schools defined the terms of Germany's school wars. Teachers in the *Gymnasia*, university professors, and medical and legal professionals, firmly believing in the educational value of a liberal education, and reluctant to give up the social prestige attached to their exclusive entitlements as graduates of a humanistic secondary education, lobbied for the *Gymnasium*. Various organizations of modern school teachers and administrators, of professionals working in technical fields, faculty members of technical universities, town councils and chambers of commerce spoke up for the modern schools. While the progressive modernization of the country should have persuaded the Ministry of Education to throw its support to the side of the modern schools, fears of their graduates flooding the labor market and apprehensions about creating an "academic proletariat" prevented this from happening until the end of the century.

The denouement of the German school wars came in two Imperial School Conferences in 1890 and 1900. The Emperor himself intervened and took the side of the modernists. He sharply criticized the secondary

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<sup>68</sup>Tyack, *One Best System*, 127.



schools for overworking their students mentally, for neglecting to prepare them for the demands of modern industry, and he deplored the schools' lack of national spirit. He said that "he spoke for all fathers in demanding less homework, fewer classes, an easier *Abitur* examination, and more exercise," and he exhorted his audience: "We must make German the basis of the *Gymnasium*; we should raise young Germans, not young Greeks and Romans."<sup>69</sup>

The decades of reform efforts brought structural changes to Prussia's secondary school system that remained basically unchanged for the next half century. "By 1908," wrote James Albisetti, "all holders of an *Abitur*, whether male or female, whether from a classical, semiclassical, or modern school, could matriculate at any German university, even if certain fields such as theology continued to require specific preparation." For many parents and their sons, Albisetti continued, this entitlement meant a flight "from an unwanted classical curriculum that the *Gymnasium*'s near monopoly over university and career privileges had forced them to endure."<sup>70</sup> For those who had fought on the side of the reformers and acted as spokesmen for civil society, the changes meant victory. Their jubilation was summed up in a statement made as early as 1878 by the director of a modern secondary school: "In the past the civil servant was the master and the citizen the submissive servant. Today, however, the submissive servant has become a well-off and influential master who prescribes the country's laws which the civil servant will have to execute."<sup>71</sup> This triumphal joy, however, was unjustified and ill conceived. The civil servant remained in his accustomed place of authority. As Herrlitz, Hopf, and Titze wrote, an accommodation had been reached between the elites of Germany's educated and propertied bourgeoisies.<sup>72</sup> The state soon showed that, far from having lost authority and having ceded its directive powers over the country's schools to civil society, it had, by granting equal entitlements to modern schools and their graduates, extended its reach over all of the country's secondary schools.

Industrial modernization also spurred the ascendancy of state power over the country's primary and middle schools. Federal contributions to local school expenditures rose from only 5 percent in 1871 to more than 50 percent during the 1890s. This made it possible that tuition and fees,

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<sup>69</sup>See documents in Michael and Schepp, *Politik und Schule*, vol. 1, pp. 414-421. For a detailed and illuminating discussion of the German school wars see James C. Albisetti, *Secondary School Reform in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 140-291. The quotations from the Emperor's speech are taken from Albisetti, *Secondary School Reform*, 211 and 3.

<sup>70</sup>Albisetti, *Secondary School Reform*, 292 and 311.

<sup>71</sup>Ludwig Schacht, *Über die Gleichberechtigung der Realschule I. Ordnung mit dem *Gymnasium** (Elberfeld: Lucas, 1878), 66.

<sup>72</sup>Hans-Georg Herrlitz, Wulf Hopf and Hartmut Titze, *Deutsche Schulgeschichte von 1800 bis zur Gegenwart: Eine Einführung* (Weinheim und München: Juventa, 1993), 107.

which in 1871 had financed 19 percent of the country's elementary school budgets and had been paid by parents, were abolished in 1888. As a result, urban poor schools disappeared and attendance in rural elementary schools rose to nearly 100 percent.<sup>73</sup> Impelled by the demand of industry for literate workers the ministry improved salaries and insurance programs for elementary school teachers. Graduates of the teacher seminaries were granted the privilege of one-year military service instead of the usual three-year term. Middle and vocational schools likewise underwent a government supported expansion in the years between the foundation of the Second Reich and the outbreak of the First World War. The educational goals of civil society were about to be attained. Yet in the process, the state had solidified its hold over civil society.

### Conclusion

In Prussia and the United States the nineteenth century had witnessed an ongoing, see-saw battle between the representatives of local and state control over elementary and secondary schools. The battle, however, was not a mere power play over control for control's sake, although that surely was one of the issues. Behind it lay questions of wide-reaching significance. What are schools for, and whose interest do they serve? Parents, landlords, churches, civic communities, philosophers, educators, and provincial and state governments offered answers to these questions and with various degrees of intensity defended or advanced their positions. Throughout the century the see-sawing took place against the background of a slowing, shifting balance away from local toward increasing state control. By the century's end, state direction and supervision of schooling in both countries was in the ascendancy though the issue was by no means settled.

It would be a mistake to identify the protagonists in this battle in either country with permanently fixed ideological positions as either politically or pedagogically conservative or liberal. While as individuals they certainly subscribed to defined ideological views, looked at as a group and over time, neither the spokespersons for local control nor the advocates of state administration remained consistently educational traditionalists or reformers. Depending on how they viewed their interests, representatives of either party could speak at one time in defense of existing pedagogical practices and institutional arrangements and at other times propose innovations and reforms. Localism or cosmopolitanism, to use Carl Kaestle's terms,<sup>74</sup> bore no necessary relationship to ideology or educational philosophy. Most often their partisans aligned themselves with economic and social interests.

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<sup>73</sup>Herrlitz, Hopf and Titze, *Deutsche Schulgeschichte*, 109.

<sup>74</sup>Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 77.

Of greater significance is the fact that in each country, regardless whether they fought on the side of local or state control, educational traditionalists and reformers always existed together. As Jürgen Oelkers expressed it, “modern education always implicates reform, because its concepts adjust to inadequacies, stimulate practical innovations which in turn produce inadequacies that call for renewed reform.”<sup>75</sup> Or, as I might put it, educational reform serves as the dialectical counterpart to existing school practices as the ‘yin’ complements the ‘yang.’ One would not exist without the other. For the historian the interesting question is on which side of the local/state control divide each appears at a particular moment.

Despite the over-all similar nature of the conflict on both sides of the Atlantic between defenders of local control and proponents of state control, there were significant differences in the way the battle has been fought. In Prussia, the impetus for state control had come from philosophers and statesmen. Resistance had arisen chiefly from among the same ranks and from among the urban propertied bourgeoisie. In the United States, social and political reformers proposed a more centralized and supervised administration of schools within states. Their opponents, rallying under the banner of local control, gathered their support from among hesitant taxpayers and members of ethnic, religious, and racial minorities.

In Prussia, it was taken as axiomatic that schools were “institutions of the state.” That claim, first set down in the Prussian Land Law of 1794, remained a guiding conception from the late eighteenth century throughout the days of the *Kaiserreich*, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the Federal Republic. In the United States the population’s ethnic and racial heterogeneity allowed for no such common legal tradition. Instead, it placed a premium on group rather than state initiative in the founding of schools. It lent force to the concept of the “little red school house” in city ward and rural district as symbol and centerpiece of a community’s sense of identity.

The instrument through which the Prussian state, despite its reluctance to finance local schools, managed to solidify its hold over the country’s school system was the civil service. This corps of *Beamten*, largely independent of partisan influence and looking back to a long tradition of state service, supplied the administrative bond that held the system together. By contrast, an educational civil service of state administrators did not come into being in the United States before the middle of the nineteenth century. It reached its fullest dimensions only during the progressive years after the turn of the century. Given its late development its members never could assume that their views would prevail over those of the defenders of

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<sup>75</sup>Jürgen Oelkers, *Reformpädagogik: Eine Kritische Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd ed. (Weinheim und München: Juventa, 1996), 15.

local control who, to this day, in rural areas and cities, speak up for parental and group rights.

Finally, in Prussia the relative ethnic and religious homogeneity of its people, a long-established consciousness of distinctions of social class, and a political tradition of acceptance of and reliance on state direction contrasted markedly with the heterogeneity of America's ethnic, racial, and religious immigrant groups, their geographical and social mobility, and their willingness, even insistence, to govern themselves in their local communities. Taken together, all these factors assigned in Prussia a well-accepted role to state initiative and control. In the United States they permitted wide latitude to the forces of civil society.